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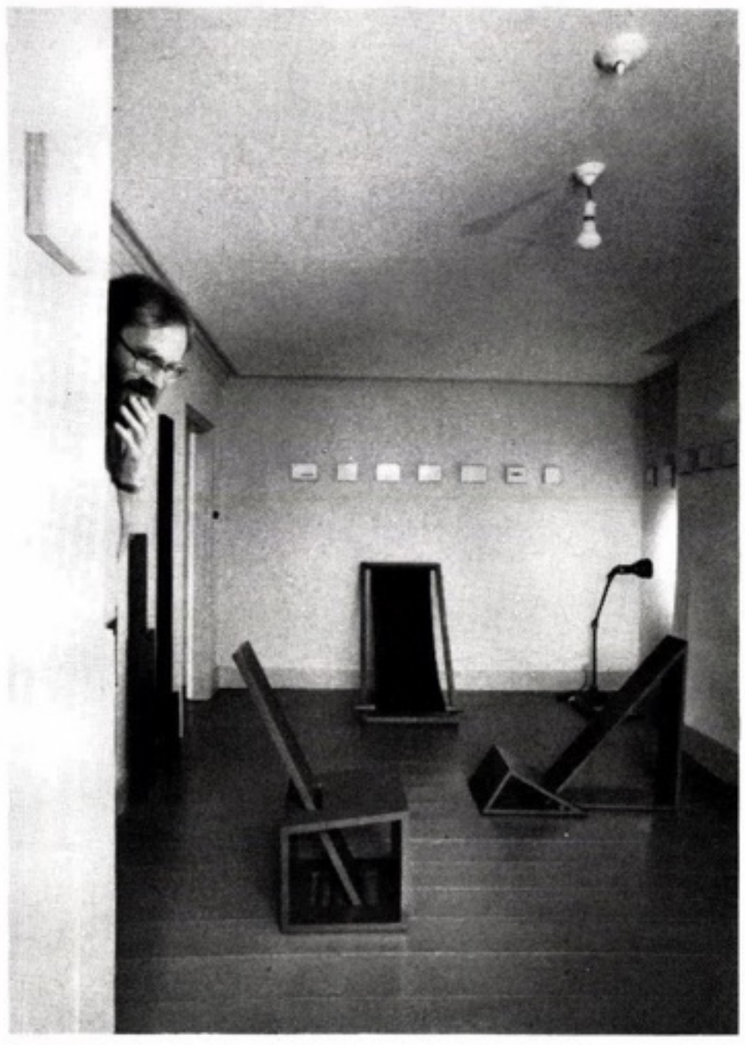
THE MAKER'S EYE

The Crafts Council's new gallery and resource centre is now open. Ralph Turner, Director of Exhibitions, introduces the inaugural show

The extended premises at Waterloo Place gives the Crafts Council three times its former gallery space – there are now three galleries – as well as more space for the information service, a home for the Collection, a coffee-bar and lecture room. With these new facilities we can show more work and our presence at the bottom of Lower Regent Street will be hard to miss. With the anticipated new large audience about to descend, the opening exhibition needed to be a popular event – one that would stimulate and inform the public of the diversity of styles and craft disciplines. Many people still have a very narrow view of crafts and *The Maker's Eye* is therefore intended to be a crash course.

The Maker's Eye is seen through the personalities and tastes of the people who have selected it. It was John Houston, writer and exhibition organiser, who first told me that he felt my approach to directing an exhibition was always through the personality of the maker, thus differing from the usual academic approach. Now, having been asked to think about *The Maker's Eye*, how it came about and why, I realise John is right: this show is all to do with people; I have relied entirely on personalities to bring the show together.

When I think over the many exhibitions I have done, it is always the individuals who spring to mind first and the objects second. For *The Maker's Eye* we chose our

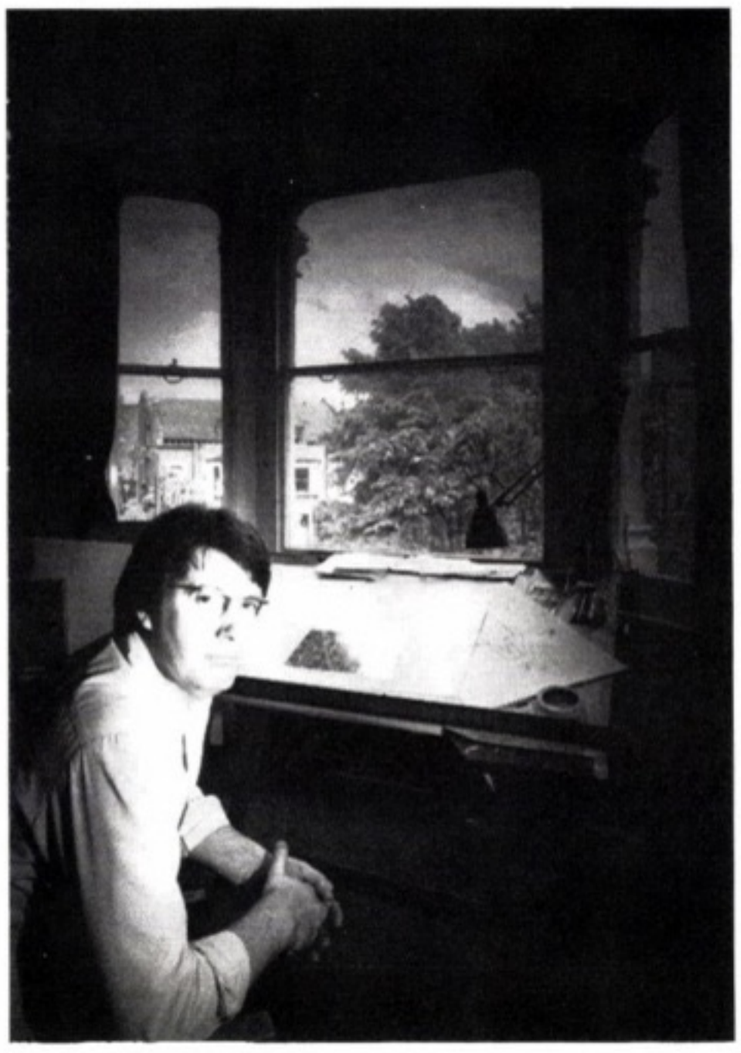


group of fourteen selectors with care, to capture a good cross-section of interests and age groups, from eminent makers, such as Enid Marx and Michael Cardew, to young craftspeople starting off on their careers. An early criterion was that all selectors must be makers who had demonstrated a particular point of view through their work. The brief to the selectors was to look at the crafts and choose a body of work to reflect the crafts as they had experienced them, placing an emphasis on the past ten years. If they wished, they could include historical work, but limited to this century. After an initial meeting in London last February, the selectors were asked to submit their first draft proposals. Initially, this was to edit out duplications and correct any imbalance. But looking at these draft proposals, there were several duplications which we decided to keep; after all, if six people out of fourteen were asking for silver by Michael Rowe and ironwork by Ivan Smith it was significant, saying something about Michael and Ivan and about the present state of silversmithing and blacksmithing. We encouraged them to look outside their own disciplines, thus broadening the scope of the show and emphasising their tastes and points of view. Most responded to this with considerable verve – there are lots of surprises in store. The resulting show

consists of fourteen environments built out of the work itself.

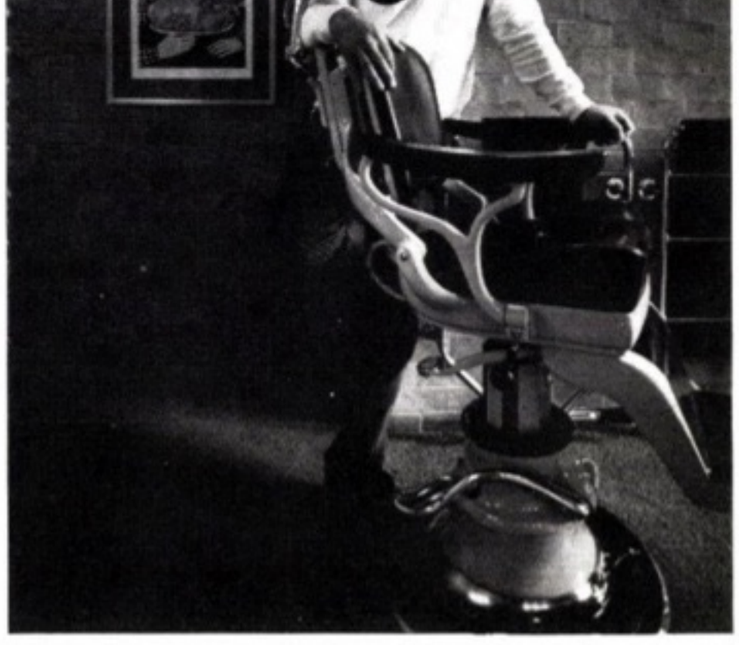
The catalogue for *The Maker's Eye* attempts to capture the essence of the show. To achieve that we have had to assemble the whole exhibition five months ahead of its opening, giving the selectors the chance to see precisely what they had chosen and make the final alterations. The photographers then stepped in: Phil Sayer zipped across the country photographing the selectors, Ian Dobbie set up a system for photographing each of the five hundred exhibits, and David Ward emerged eventually from our temporary warehouse in Whitehall after six weeks spent composing the colour photographs. Barry Mazur, designer of the installation of the exhibition, thus also had the rare opportunity of seeing the actual works to be exhibited as opposed to reading a list of items. Even given our enlarged galleries, space has been a problem. Mary Farmer could not have her Bristol car and David Watkins still laments his loss of Concorde! Even so, the exhibition consists of five hundred exhibits representing over three hundred makers and includes: a harvest loaf and a copy of an Eileen Gray table (Enid Marx); Post Office and London Underground signs (David Kindersley); a saddle (David Pye); Zandra Rhodes and Jean Muir designs (Malcolm Parsons); a ten foot painting by Michael Moon (Michael Brennand-Wood); Andrew Logan's *Pegasus* monument (Connie Stevenson); a copy of a Charles Rennie Mackintosh table (Erik de Graaff); a David Nash twig sculpture (John Makepeace);

William Scott and Ben Nicholson drawings and paintings (Alison Britton); Triumph Bonneville motorbike and peg rugs (Emmanuel Cooper); and sliptrailed earthenware made by Bernard Leach in 1929 (Michael Cardew). This bizarre list would make most academics shudder – add a further four hundred and sixty objects and you wouldn't see them for dust!



Eight of the fourteen selectors photographed at home. From left, column 1: David Kindersley, alphabetician; 2: Erik de Graaff, furniture maker; 3: David Pye, woodworker; column 4, from top: Michael Brennand-Wood, embroiderer; Mary Farmer, weaver; David Watkins, jeweller; column 5: Alison Britton, potter; John Makepeace, furniture maker. All black and white photographs by Philip Sayer; all colour photographs by David Ward

The Maker's Eye is an ambitious undertaking for all of us, but one that we hope does justice to the makers whose work is represented and the Council whose tenth birthday it celebrates. The exhibition tells us that the crafts in Britain today are not a minority interest, élitist and restricted to the middle classes, but that many people are in some way still connected to this aspect of living. It points the way to a broader definition whereby we recognise craftsmen and craftswomen in factories, drawing offices, street markets, studios and shops.



Craft selections by, left from top: Erik de Graaff, furniture maker, Malcolm Parsons, fashion accessory maker, Mary Farmer, weaver. Choices include Ralph Ball lights, Jean Muir and Zandra Rhodes clothes, Henderson and Poncelet pots and Stephanie Bergman hanging

DAVID WARD

Craft selections by, right, from top: David Pye, woodworker, Emmanuel Cooper, potter and Editor of Ceramic Review*; John Makepeace, furniture maker. Opposite: some of David Kindersley's choices, including Edward Johnston's Underground sign*

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